

a spirit of independent inquiry existed among some at least of the priest-hating squires and knights. Langland corn-plained, some years before Wycliffe rose to fame, that the upper classes were in the habit of discussing the mysteries of religion among themselves * as if they were clergy.'

At meat in their mirths, when minstrels
are still, Then tell they of the Trinity a
tale or two, And bring forth a bald reason
and quote St. Bernard, And put forth a
presumption to prove the sooth. Thus they
drivel at their dais the deity to know, And
gnaw God with the gorge when their gut is
full.

He describes how they call in question the justice of condemning all mankind for the fault of Adam, and how they * carp against clerks crabbed words.¹

This evidence as to the attitude of the upper classes, helps to account for a curious act of profanity committed by a knight of "Wiltshire in 1881. When he had received the consecrated wafer into his hand, he jumped up and ran out of church, locked himself in his house, and ate the Host with his dinner. This was not the spirit of Wycliffe and his first disciples, who one and all believed in Consubstantiation and revered, though they did not worship, the Sacrament. No one sympathised with the man's profanity ; it was an isolated exception. But the incident could scarcely have taken place if the knight had lived in a highly devotional society. No one suggested that he was mad.² It is safe to say that among the upper and middle classes, among such types of men as rode with Chaucer on the Canterbury pilgrimage, the Lollards were able to reckon on a very general dislike of clerical pretensions, and in many cases there was a tendency to independent opinion and free thought. As regards the lower classes the evidence is more scanty. But the sack of monasteries, and the murder of the Primate and other clergy, point to the same dislike of the Church, the same irreverence that we find in higher grades of society.

Against this tendency must be set the great influence of the friars ; their command of the confessional and the consciences of so many ; the still prevalent belief in the value of

» *P PL*, B, x. 52-7, 101-16, * Wals., i.
450-1.